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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 04 BAGHDAD 004836

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SUBJECT: PM JA'AFARI PLANS MAJOR SHAKEUP OF IRAQI MILITARY LEADERSHIP; WARNED BY MNF-I AND EMBASSY

Classified By: CHARGE D'AFFAIRES DAVID M. SATTERFIELD FOR REASONS 1.4 (a), (b), AND (d).

[1](#)1. (S//REL GBR AUS) SUMMARY: Iraqi Prime Minister Ja'afari is preparing to sign decrees which will lead to a major reorganization of the Ministry of Defense (MOD) and the Iraqi Joint and Army Land Forces Headquarters. The new leadership personnel he plans to bring in are all Shia. MNF-I Commanding General Casey warned Ja'afari that such a move would amount to a wholesale reorganization of Iraq's military leadership during a time of war and would be a threat to the national security of the country. Charge and British Ambassador told Ja'afari that, in addition to the grave security implications, such an obviously political move to pack the MOD on the eve of a major election would fuel sectarianism and would amount to "madness." Ja'afari admitted that the move was purely political as members of his political coalition are demanding their "fair share" of places in the MOD. He claimed not to like it and to be personally opposed to the need for such quotas but kept repeating: that the Transitional Administrative Law (TAL) required diversity in the MOD; that since his government took office he has been talking about making such a change; and that unless it is illegal he plans to move ahead. GEN Casey persuaded Ja'afari not to act until he, Ja'afari, returns from a planned trip to Japan that begins on December 4. When Ja'afari returns, Casey will present him an analysis of the serious harm this plan would do to Iraq's security. END SUMMARY.

[1](#)2. (S//REL GBR AUS) On the evening of December 2, MNF-I Deputy Commanding General Houghton was called to the Prime Minister's office on short notice. Upon arrival, he was met by Senior Advisor Adnan Ali, who gave him copies of three decrees pertaining to a reorganization of the MOD and the top ranks of the Iraqi Army. These decrees: abolished several high ranking committees and positions; called for ten new senior appointments to the MOD, all of which involve placing a uniformed officer in a position formerly held by a civilian; and replaced the commanding generals of the 6th, 8th, and 9th Iraqi Army Divisions. These generals are the best division commanders in the Army and their divisions are located in the first areas likely to be turned over to Iraqi control. MNF-I and the U.S. and British embassies immediately requested a meeting with Ja'afari to discuss the implications of these moves. On the evening of Dec. 3, GEN Casey, Charge, British Ambassador Patey, MNF-I Deputy Commanding General Houghton, and Acting PolMilCounselor called on Ja'afari at his residence. Ja'afari was accompanied by Chief of Staff Abdul Aziz al-Tamimi and Senior Advisor Adnan Ali.

"ARE YOU SERIOUS?"

[1](#)3. (S//REL GBR AUS) GEN Casey began the meeting by telling Ja'afari that he had seen the three decrees and wanted to know the Prime Minister's intent. "Are these serious proposals you're planning to announce?" Ja'afari replied that he has been talking about changing the structure of the MOD since his government took power in April. He said that the TAL requires balance in the MOD. In the previous government, the minister was a Shia, so the other senior positions in the ministry went to Sunnis and Kurds. When Ja'afari came in, the Shia minister was replaced by Sunni Saadoun Dulime, who Ja'afari acknowledged is much more concerned with the national interest than was the prior minister. Nevertheless, this meant that the top man was a Sunni, making it necessary to maintain balance by juggling other top portfolios. Ja'afari maintained he had discussed this many times with GEN Casey, Ambassador Khalilzad, and the Charge. He said that two or three months ago he had given the Ambassador a list of three names of possible top level appointments to the Iraqi National Intelligence Service. Ja'afari continued that "as far as I'm concerned, this is an agreement I must live up to." He believes the most important thing is that the new appointees are patriotic, are well qualified, and perform well. That said, he admitted that he didn't know any of the individuals on the list. However, he considers this normal, pointing out that he was even forced to accept ministers in his cabinet about whom he had reservations. Nevertheless, he has held the government together. Ja'afari concluded by saying "We did not come up with the TAL, but it is our responsibility to follow it and

bring in the right people. I believe in direct democracy. I do not believe in quotas, but this was agreed upon to obtain balance and I must obey. I did not want to have Deputy Prime Ministers, but I agreed because it was required by the law."

"THIS IS NOT THE ACT OF A WAR GOVERNMENT"

14. (S//REL GBR AUS) GEN Casey replied that if this is what Ja'afari believes, then he has been poorly served by his advisors. He firmly warned Ja'afari that "this is a wholesale restructuring of the armed forces two weeks before a major election at a time when your country is engaged in a war, and is not the action of a war government. This will disrupt two and a half years of work with the General Staff and Land Forces Headquarters at a critical time, will be seen by the people as a negative act, and will in turn strengthen the insurgency." Ja'afari asked if Casey was concerned about the change to the structure or with the names proposed. GEN Casey replied he does not know the men named and will have to review the list in more detail but that he is clearly concerned about the proposed change to the structure of the military. "My problem is the impact on the ministry and the forces they supervise and the fact that your advisors recommended to you this type of change at this time without consulting with the Minister of Defense, which is irresponsible." GEN Casey made clear that we are not questioning Ja'afari's sovereign authority but noted that we are his partners in this struggle and must consult on such important changes together. Ja'afari replied that he had spoken to Dulime several times, and Dulime had always pledged he would do whatever the Prime Minister ordered. "He understands that this is a political agreement and has told the Iraqi united coalition that he has no problems with changes in the ranks."

A POLITICAL OBLIGATION

15. (S//REL GBR AUS) Charge told Ja'afari that, while GEN Casey had spoken as a military expert, it is critical that the political consequences of such a move also be fully appreciated. If Ja'afari goes through with the planned reorganization, there will be a definite perception that this is a significant political decision eleven days before a major election that should be left to the incoming government. It will be seen as an obvious attempt to pack the MOD with Shias at the expense of the Sunnis. Ja'afari replied again that he had spoken of taking these steps for a long time. He emphasized that the move needs to be looked at in a legal context: "Is this illegal? If it is, it cannot go forward. If it is not, I will consider arguments against it; but as long as the intent of the TAL is to maintain balance, I must do this. I am not Prime Minister because I was selected by the people. I'm Prime Minister due to the agreement of political parties. Although I do not believe in this, this is a coalition government based on political agreements."

16. (S//REL GBR AUS) The British Ambassador seconded Charge's view, noting that GEN Casey's concerns about the efficiency and effectiveness of the army are the most important factors. But also, does Iraq really want to be in the position where government and military officials are picked by political parties based on their religious sect? If this is the case, Iraq is on the road to sectarianism. He pointed out that the names on the decrees are the same as those which surfaced two months ago when an attempt was made to sweep senior officials out of the MOD under charges of corruption. The list was handed over to the Minister of Defense by an official of a Shia political faction. Ambassador Patey assured Ja'afari that no one is questioning his integrity and intentions to appoint patriotic officers, but to make such changes a few weeks before the election with the names proposed will have a deleterious effect on perceptions and on our ability to fight the insurgency. Ambassador Patey also raised a legal question, pointing out that it was for the Presidency Council to select officers, once recommended by the Prime Minister or Minister of Defense. Therefore, decrees naming officials must go before the Presidency Council.

17. (S//REL GBR AUS) Again, Ja'afari fell back on his argument that as long as the move is not illegal, he is obligated by politics to act. "I understand the military concerns, but this was agreed to by the political parties. I am a Prime Minister in a coalition government, this has been agreed upon a long time ago. If there are concerns about the legality or the qualifications of the names I will reexamine them, but I am obligated to live up to the agreement. What am I going to tell them? That it's not my responsibility? I can't just tell them I can't do this because it's late in my term."

"WE HAVE AN AGREEMENT, TOO"

18. (S//REL GBR AUS) GEN Casey again reiterated his belief that Ja'afari's advisors had not adequately explained the magnitude of the changes contemplated. "This is not replacing a few people. This is a wholesale reorganization of the land forces headquarters." Casey reminded Ja'afari that the first time they met, they had agreed there would be no political disruptions of the functioning of the security ministries. Other political leaders from all factions had received this same briefing. "We have an agreement, too," Casey emphasized. Ja'afari replied that he concurred that the military cannot be politicized.

QUESTIONS OF BALANCE

19. (S//REL GBR AUS) Ja'afari then turned to Tamimi and asked him about the list of names. Tamimi replied that all on the list are Shia but that this helps to maintain the proper balance in the MOD. MNF-I Deputy Commanding General Houghton disagreed, producing figures to demonstrate otherwise. He pointed out that of the 58 senior positions at the Headquarters staff, there are currently 15 Sunni, 38 Shia, 4 Kurds, and one Turkman. Under the proposed changes, ten new Shia will be brought in at the expense of the Sunni and Kurds. The same can be said for the division commander positions. Of the ten, there are currently 3 Sunni, 4 Shia, 3 Kurd, and one Turkman. The three new proposed commanders are Shia, and some of those to be replaced are not. GEN Casey added that the three commanders slated to be replaced are the best in the Army. Ja'afari replied that all that matters to him is the patriotism of the officers, but the quotas were agreed upon when the government was formed. Ambassador Patey pointed out that the Shia already have more than fifty percent of the top slots in the military and questioned whether the quota agreement that applied to the formation of the government even applied to the military. Houghton then raised another concern, noting that, under the plan, ten civilians at the ministry are to be replaced by military officers. This jeopardizes the concept of civilian control over the military and is a bad move that will dangerously empower military officers to have control over the ministry. Ja'afari replied that these observations are important and that he will see that, in addition to maintaining sectarian balance, balance between the uniformed and civilian leadership also is preserved.

"NATIONAL SECURITY MUST BE YOUR FOREMOST CONCERN"

10. (S//REL GBR AUS) GEN Casey forcefully returned to the main point: "As Prime Minister, national security must be your foremost concern. You are the Commander in Chief of the armed forces. Your country is under vicious attack by an armed insurgency and is under emergency measures. The changes you propose to make will fundamentally affect your ability to defend the nation. If there was ever a time when national security concerns must trump political deals, this is it." Ja'afari rejoined that we should take into consideration and appreciate all he has done to hold this government together: "I took from the Shia to give to the Sunnis and Kurds. I am now near the end of my term and they feel it is their right to have their fair share in the ministry." Ambassador Patey remonstrated that what Ja'afari was planning to do -- change the country's military structure in the middle of a war with an election approaching -- is against common sense. Charge warned Ja'afari that such a move would be "madness." Talk of balancing the ministry might have made sense in April but not now, before an election when such a move will be seen only as an attempt to pack the MOD with Shia and will surely serve to inflame sectarian suspicions and passions.

ONE MORE CHANCE

11. (S//REL GBR AUS) Convinced that Ja'afari was failing or refusing to see our points, GEN Casey and Charge persuaded Ja'afari to consider this one more time upon his return from a pending trip to Japan. When Ja'afari returns, MNF-I and Embassy will present a detailed briefing outlining the dangers, military and political, of pursuing the proposed course of action. Ja'afari agreed and also said that he would have two members of his staff work with us in the meantime to try to understand and address our concerns. He also agreed to take this matter before the Ministerial Committee for National Security.

COMMENT

12. (S//REL GBR AUS) This is the third time in two months that Shia political factions have tried to gain control of the MOD. They make no secret of the fact that they harbor deep suspicions of a "Sunni controlled" army, recalling that all coups in Iraq's history have sprung from the military. Ja'afari, entertaining hopes of retaining the prime ministry in the next government, is squeezed between what he might believe is right and the political realities of trying to maintain his support with activist Shia factions. We will continue to forcefully push back this proposal (including through discussions with the Kurds and SCIRI leader Hakim). This proposal, if successful, would seriously impede the progress made to date in developing the capabilities of the Iraqi Army and threaten the ability of the Army to function effectively, at least in the short term. In addition, this move, if carried out, would serve to confirm the worst fears of the Sunni population that Iranian-supported Shia hard-liners are intent on controlling all organs of Iraq's armed security services. END COMMENT.
SATTERFIELD